

## Message Text

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42

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-10 ISO-00 INRE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00

USIE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 NEAE-00 A-01 OPR-02 SY-05 EB-07

COME-00 AID-05 SCCT-01 TRSE-00 OMB-01 OC-05 CCO-00

/100 W

----- 089713

O R 021242Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7934

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN NY

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK

COMMSIXTHFLT

CTF SIX ZERO

CTF SIX ONE

CTF SIX TWO

CTG SIX ZERO PT TWO

FOSIF ROTA SPAIN

FICEURLANT NORFOLK VA

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DIA WASHDC

CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 20

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, PFOR, LE

SUBJECT: BEIRUT REMAINS CALM, BUT POLITICAL ACCORD MORE ELUSIVE  
THAN EVER

REF BEIRUT 15727 1425Z)

SUMMARY: RELATIVE QUIET HAS PREVAILED IN BEIRUT SINCE  
THE NEW YEAR BEGAN, DESPITE SPORADIC OUTBREAKS OF FIRING.  
HOWEVER, A HARDENING OF THE MARONITE POSITION HAS DASHED  
THE RISING HOPES ON THE POLITICAL FRONT. END SUMMARY

1. THE SECURITY SITUATION IN BEIRUT SINCE THE START OF THE  
NEW YEAR HAS CONTINUED TO BE RELATIVELY CALM. ARMED  
MEN HAVE LEFT MOST POINTS IN THE CENTER OF THE CITY. IN  
SOME CASES, HOWEVER, THEY HAVE RETREATED ONLY TO THE  
INTERIOR OF NEARBY BUILDINGS READY TO REAPPEAR QUICKLY.  
REPORTEDLY, LEFTIST ELEMENTS STILL OCCUPY THE MURR  
BUILDING. SPORADIC EXCHANGES OF FIRE HAVE BEEN FREQUENT,  
ESPECIALLY IN THE TRADITIONALLY HOT AREAS OF THE EAST BEIRUT  
SUBURBS. TRAFFIC IN THE CITY REMAINS LIGHTER THAN NORMAL  
AS PEOPLE HESITATE TO VENTURE OUT. A SMALL INCREASE IN  
COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY WAS NOTED THIS MORNING, JAN 2,  
DESPITE THE FACT THAT THIS IS THE MOSLEM NEW YEAR.

2. AN ATTACK BY UNKNOWN ELEMENTS AGAINST THE JOINT  
OFFICES OF THE NEWSPAPER "AN-NAHAR" AND "L'ORIENT-LE  
JOUR" NIGHT OF JAN 1-2 WAS BEATEN OFF BY COMBINED  
FORCE OF ISF AND PALESTINIAN ARMED STRUGGLE COMMAND.  
ABOUT 10 OF THE ATTACKERS WERE ARRESTED, BUT THEIR IDENTITY  
IS AS YET UNDETERMINED. SINCE THEY POSSESSED ABOUT 30  
KILOS OF DYNAMITE WHEN ARRESTED, THERE IS SPECULATION THEY  
WERE AIMING TO HIT OTHER OFFICES IN THE HAMRA DISTRICT ALSO.

3. LOOKING AHEAD, MOST OBSERVERS NOW BELIEVE THE CURRENT  
TRUCE WILL LAST ONLY A SHORT TIME BECAUSE THE SECURITY  
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IMPROVEMENT IS NOT BEING MATCHED BY PROGRESS ON THE  
POLITICAL FRONT. THE MEETING OF MARONITE LEADERS  
DEC 31 (REFTEL) RESULTED IN CONCURRENCE ON A HARD LINE.  
REFLECTING LONG-STANDING CHRISTIAN FEARS OF THEIR MINORITY  
STATUS IN THE ARAB WORLD AS A WHOLE, THE MARONITE  
FIGURES (WHO DID NOT INCLUDE PATRIARCH KHREISH, AN  
IMPORTANT MODERATING FORCE) REPORTEDLY CAME OUT OF THE  
MEETING UNITED AGAINST CHANGING THE 6 - 5 RATION IN

PARLIAMENT. THE CONSIDER THIS A "GUARANTEE " OF CHRISTIAN STATUS IN THE SOLE CHRISTIAN-ORIENTED COUNTRY OF THE NEAR EAST, NOT A PRIVILEGE AS THE MOSLEMS TEND TO VIEW IT. ACCORDING TO ONE KNOWLEDGEABLE LEBANESE JOURNALIST WHO SPOKE TO EMBOFF TODAY, THESE MARONITE LEADERS WOULD INSIST ON OTHER GUARANTEES TO REPLACE THIS ONE BEFORE GIVING IT UP, AND NO OTHER IRON-CLAD GUARANTEE IS IN SIGHT. CHRISTIAN FEAR OF THE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IS THE KEY HERE, ACCORDING TO THIS SOURCE. A GUARANTEE ABOUT PALESTINIAN ACTIVITIES FROM, SAY, OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES MIGHT BE ACCEPTED AS FAR AS PLO IS CONCERNED, BUT THE MARONITES DO NOT BELIEVE THE "REJECTIONISTS" COULD BE DISCIPLINED.

4. ACCORDING TO THE KATAEB NEWSPAPER "AL AMAL" TODAY, THE KATAEB PARTY WILL ISSUE ITS OWN REFORM PLAN IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THIS IA APPARENTLY AN ATTEMPT TO KEEP THE POLITICAL DIALOGUE GOING, BUT ON TERMS MORE FAVORABLE TO THE CHRISTIANS. HOPEFULLY THE KATAEB PROGRAM WILL BE SOMEWHAT MORE FLEXIBLE CHRISTIANS THAN THE CURRENT MARONITE STANCE.

5. THERE HAS BEEN NO DISCERNIBLE REACTION FROM THE MOSLEM-LEFTIST CAMP TO THE HARDENING OF THE MARONITE POSITION. HOWEVER, SAEB SALAM AND KAMAL JUMBLATT HAVE MET IN WHAT IS REPORTED TO BE AN EFFORT TO COMPOSE THEIR DIFFERENCES. IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT SALAM, A CONSERVATIVE MOSLEM WHO HAS RECENTLY ATTACKED THE EXTREME LEFT, AND JUMBLATT, THE SECULAR LEFT'S LEADING SPOKESMAN, WILL BECOME ALLIES OVER THE LONG TERM. BUT EACH HAS TACTICAL REASONS TO APPEAR FRIENDLY AT THE MOMENT. SALAM CONTINUES TO AIM HIS MAIN POLITICAL HOSTILITY AT PRESIDENT FRANGIE, AND SUPPORT FOR THIS IS ALWAYS USEFUL TO HIM. JUMBLATT'S INTEREST IS TO HEAD OFF AN OPEN SPLIT BETWEEN THE MOSLEM  
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WIND AND THE LEFTIST WING OF THE OPPOSITION CAMP. ALTHOUGH SALAM'S RECENT EFFORT TO BUILD UP HIS OWN MOSLEM-BASED POSITION EXCLUDING THE LEFTISTS HAS BORNE MEAGER FRUIT, IT HAS FOUND SOME RESPONSE IN MOSLEM CIRCLES AND IS A DANGER FOR JUMBLATT.  
GODLEY

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NNN



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